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POWDER-FUL—Vail's back bowls are left relatively un-groomed so that "powderhounds" such as this skier can en-

joy gliding through deep snow. The village has expanded but the original clock tower is still a landmark at the resort.

Vail May Have the First—and the Last Resort

BY BOB LOCHNER
Times Staff Writer

VAIL, Colo.—To hear some people talk, Jerry Ford put Vail on the map. They're wrong. Pete Seibert and his buddies from the 10th Mountain Division did that in 1962 with the help of some money from Texas.

They not only put Vail on the map, they also put East Vail, West Vail, Eagle Vail and Lionshead. The complex probably ranks No. 1 on any list of American ski resorts, and a case could be made that it holds a similar standing in the world.

It used to be that "it happened in Sun Valley," but as the old Glenn Miller song went, that was "a long time ago." And although Aspen, 100 miles farther by car from Denver's Stapleton Airport than Vail (in the winter), still claims to be Ski Town, USA, it has fallen behind.

Vail, with 23,000 beds and a potential of 35,000, with 10 square miles of skiing terrain, with 16 chairlifts and one reconstructed gondola, is now America's first resort. And 10 miles to the West, rising from the valley under the same management, is what may be America's last resort, Beaver Creek.

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It's a typical week in Vail. Plenty of powder. Alternate days of snowstorms and then bright sunshine in a sky still remarkably blue despite the increasing encroachment of automobiles. Vice President Mondale and his family are among the celebrities skiing the well-groomed runs and the deep back bowls. Others include Clint Eastwood, Janet Leigh, Ray Stark (the producer) and Henry Mancini.

The Hollywood glitterfolks "all used to go to Sun Valley but now they come here," Vail Associates president Jack Marshall said after lunch with some of them.

The "locals," who number about 4,500 shopkeepers, innkeepers, peace-

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Vail: the First and the Last Resort in U.S.?

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keepers, etc., are still talking about last week's special two-hour Charlie's Angels TV episode that was filmed entirely in Vail last December. "I enjoyed the scenery immensely, but there were a couple of corny parts," Vail official Bob Parker said. "We normally prohibit snowmobiles in the village, but the TV people said they had to have them, so we gave permission."

Jon Goldman, former program director and news director of KVMF radio in Vail who recently went to work as the resort's media spokesman, said, "It's hard to show much more of Vail in two hours, but there's no way it could take 10 minutes to get down the run off Chair No. 6 going at full speed as they did in one chase scene."

This week, however, Goldman has other worries. The Denver media are clamoring to get pictures of Walter Mondale on skis but the Vice President will permit just one photo session—this Friday. He said he's here on a vacation and doesn't want to be hassled by the press.

He's also reportedly still a bit miffed at one TV reporter from his last visit. After a run down the slopes before the cameras, Mondale had commented, "I'm afraid I'm a little rusty on my skis yet," to which the woman replied, "That's obvious from your style."

Former President Ford isn't here but he still shows up faithfully every Christmas and also pops in during the summer to host his golf tournament, staying in the home of Texan Richard D. Bass.

Dick Bass, a Vail director, also owns the Snowbird ski resort in Utah and is the brother of Harry W. Bass Jr., chairman of the board of Vail Associates. The Bass family and its Goliad Oil and Gas Co. now control 64% of Vail Associates, which developed the resort, still operates the ski facilities and is in the process of starting up Beaver Creek. Goliad gained control of Vail Associates in mid-1977, at which time founder Seibert departed to develop a ski area at Snow Basin, Utah.

"Pete could have remained here but he's an entrepreneurial type and he wasn't sure he could work within an organization where he had to answer to one man rather than to a board," Bob Parker told a reporter while riding up the gondola at Lionshead.

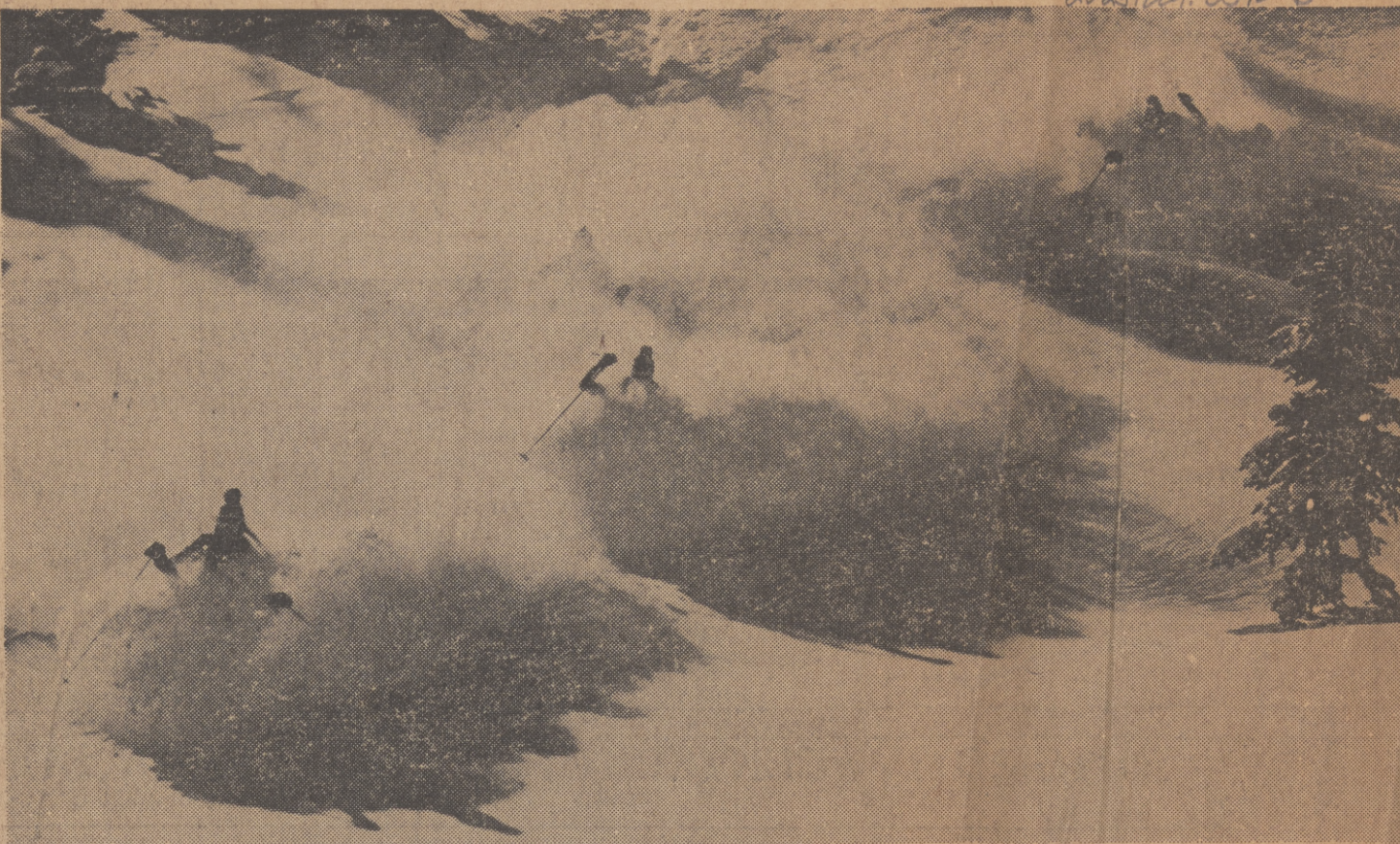
"Funny thing is, the way it's turned out, I think he would have found the new situation very compatible with his own ideas and goals for Vail."

Parker, 56, who was with Seibert from the start, has held several jobs at Vail, including assistant general manager, vice president for marketing and, currently, senior vice president for operations.

Still dark-haired and wiry from years of skiing, Parker represents Vail's last link to its origins following World War II, when a group of ex-Army ski troopers raised the capital to buy land and obtained U.S. Forest Service permits to build lifts in the valley and on the mountains they had "discovered" while training for combat.

At that time, Vail was merely the name of an 11,000-foot-high pass in the Gore Range 100 miles West of Denver. Now, it's a city of seemingly countless five-and-six-story condominiums, 76 restaurants, several hundred shops, and still growing—from one end of the valley to the other along Interstate 70. By the time Beaver Creek opens in December, 1980, it may be difficult to tell where one resort ends and the other begins.

"There's no question," Parker said, "we are now face-to-face with two critical decisions affecting both Vail and the sport of skiing as a whole. One, which is our problem: What is the limit to growth in Vail? Two,



HIGH AND DRY—Four skiers plow through Vail's powder and they're almost hidden by the snow that swirls up

around them. With 10 square miles of ski terrain, 17 major lifts and 23,000 beds, the resort rates No. 1 in U.S.

which concerns all skiers: Is Beaver Creek the last resort?"

Turning first to Vail, Parker said, "The original zoning would have permitted up to 55,000 beds, counting both permanent residents and visitors. But there have been voluntary reductions, and the Town of Vail has made several property purchases to provide open space. So the limit is in sight."

"Now, at Beaver Creek, we have agreed with the State of Colorado to a maximum limit of 10,500 beds, plus another 10,500 in supporting communities. There, we have a model situation, because Vail Associates intends to retain control of both the mountain and the base area. We hope to learn from mistakes made at Vail and not repeat them. Fewer cars, for example."

"Also, where Vail was conceived strictly as a ski resort, Beaver Creek is intended to be a full four-seasons resort. We plan to provide something

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—JACK MARSHALL, president of Vail Associates

for everyone. And we will have space equally for the visitor who wants to be totally in touch with the world, as well as for the visitor who chooses to forget the outside entirely and get back to a more natural, human environment."

Beaver Creek, acquired by Vail Associates in 1971, was originally supposed to be the site of Alpine skiing events for the 1976 Winter Olympics, which Colorado voters ultimately rejected. Subsequently, after meeting objections from environmental groups and weaving through a 52-step labyrinth of local, state and federal agencies, final approvals were obtained for development and ground was broken on July 28, 1977.

It is because of this involved process and continued opposition to lift-served skiing by environmentalists that Parker and others in the ski industry are pessimistic about any new ski area ever getting off the ground.

"Look what has happened to Disney with first Mineral King and now Independence Lake in California," Parker said. "And Aspen has had several new projects stopped. Adam's Rib, not far from here, has been put on the back burner. Will there ever be another new area anywhere in the U.S. after Beaver Creek?"

On opening day, Beaver Creek will have six chairlifts, a figure that will be increased to 15 at full build-out, when it will have a peak capacity of 9,000 skiers per day. (Vail's capacity is now 14,000 skiers per day.)

Jack Marshall, who now runs Vail Associates, agrees with Parker that Beaver Creek will have the benefit of

Vail's experience. "We have many of the same people still here who participated in the early stages of Vail's development," he said. "So we're not starting from scratch. And we don't intend to repeat any mistakes."

Formerly associated with Del Monte Properties and Elkhorn-at-Sun Valley, Marshall is not primarily a skier, as was Pete Seibert, but he speaks with pride of the improvements planned on Vail's mountains this year—doubling the size of the lodge at Mid-Vail, replacement of Chairlift No. 5, improved grooming equipment, etc. "And," he said, "what we're doing is not aimed at increasing the quantity of skiing here, but rather at improving its quality. I think both Vail Associates and the Town of Vail believe we are about as big as we should be. We have arrived at our designed numbers at approximately the same time. The mood now is definitely one of strict growth management."

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On March 26, 1976, a portion of the gondola tramway at Lionshead crashed to the snow, killing four skiers and injuring eight others. Since then, a completely new gondola has been built at Lionshead, and an older gondola on Vail Mountain has been replaced by a chairlift.

The accident, which received worldwide publicity, has not seriously affected skier attendance. Said Bob Parker: "Business remained very good right after the accident. The next season (1976-77) was the big drought, of course, but last winter was a blockbuster."

Stories this week in the Vail Trail and the Vail Villager, the two weekly newspapers, said the number of skier-days is up 9% over last season (to Feb. 1), and January's total was up 15%.

Parker said all but one of the lawsuits resulting from the gondola accident have been settled out of court.

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Business is up in Vail, and so are prices. This is reflected in everything from a six-pack of beer at the Village Grocery (\$2.50 for Coors) to a basic one-bedroom condominium unit (\$80 a night at The Willows, not including lift-tickets)

Despite the cost the restaurants are jammed, Sheika's discotheque is jumping and all the beds are full.

Hardest hit are the local employees, who are receiving fewer and fewer fringe benefits, they say, and are experiencing more and more difficulty finding a place to live. Not many can afford \$80 a night.

A driver for Vailguides, the local taxi service, said Vail's force of waitresses, sales clerks, lift operators, etc., live up to 40 miles away and commute daily. "I'm lucky," he said, "I found a room with a local family."

One girl, talking to a friend who was a salesgirl in a ski shop, said, "Well, I guess I'll take the maid's job for the rest of the season. I hate the work, but at least they give me a place to stay. Otherwise, I'd have to go home."